

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** Barringer-Norton Building  
506 Main Street, Houston, Texas

**Owner:** Mike Melnik; 1521 Japhel Realty Ltd.

**APPLICANT:** Mike Melnik; 1521 Japhel Realty Ltd.

**LOCATION:** 506 Main Street

**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** 12-19-99

**AGENDA ITEM:** Ib

**P.C. MEETING DATE:** 02/10/2000

**HPO FILE NO.:** 00L085

**DATE ACCEPTED:** 12-13-99

**HAHC HEARING:** 01-29-2000

### SITE INFORMATION

Tract 4, Block 57, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a two-story commercial building.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Barringer-Norton Building exemplifies a type of commercial building that is both historically and architecturally significant in Houston and is reflective of the diverse and progressive business merchants who established their houses of commerce in the Downtown area. Although it was originally constructed circa 1880, the architectural and historical significance of the building is derived from its façade reconstruction in 1928 by Houston architect, James Ruskin Bailey. Bailey chose the Tudor Revival style for the façade reconstruction, which is exceptionally unique and significant not only to Downtown Houston, but elsewhere in the city as well. The Barringer-Norton Company, which commissioned Bailey to rehabilitate the building for their new headquarters in 1928, was and still is one of the premier men's clothing stores in Houston. Today the company is known as Norton Ditto, which continues its legacy as one of the oldest and finest men's clothiers in the state.

The Barringer-Norton Building is located in the Main Street Market Square Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 18, 1983. The area was designated as a historic district of the City of Houston on March 5, 1997. The historic district of commercial buildings and sites constitutes Houston's largest, most nearly intact accumulation of physical resources representing the city's civic and commercial past. The surviving architecture documents the episodes of development that occurred between 1859 and the building and real estate boom of the 1920s, the half century when Houston emerged from relative obscurity to become the largest city in the southern United States. The rehabilitation in 1928 of the Barringer-Norton Building by James Raskin Bailey is a testament to that real estate boom.

Bailey was one of Houston's most popular architects of the early twentieth century. He designed residential, office, institutional and hotel structures. He was born in Philadelphia in 1889. Educated at Carnegie Tech, he came to Texas in 1908 to be a draftsman for the Texas Company (later Texaco) in Port Arthur. In 1909 he moved to Houston where he married Margaret Scott, a daughter of the President of First National Bank. From 1914 to 1919 he was engaged in a partnership with Joseph Finger, who became one of Houston's foremost architects. From 1919 to 1921, Bailey worked on his business interests, including the Ford Motor Company

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dealership. He re-entered the field of architecture in 1922 during the real estate boom in Houston. During the 1920s the financial district began to slide southward up Main Street as several new bank buildings were constructed outside the confines of the old Victorian banking corridor. One such new bank building, the Public National Bank Building at 402 Main Street, was one of Bailey's first major commissions in 1925. From that time forward, his practice seems to have focused on commissions for the rehabilitation or additions to older buildings.

In 1926 John Henry Kirby, a prominent lumber and oil man, commissioned Bailey to transform their florid Victorian house, built in 1897, and rehabilitate it into a picturesquely massed, opulently decorated, neo-Jacobean country house. Bailey redesigned the structure into a rambling, 36-room, English Manor house. The interest in this style of architecture certainly is reflected in his 1928 rehabilitation of the Barringer-Norton Building at 506 Main. Bailey also made sympathetic additions to the rear of the Spanish Mission Revival styled Eastwood Elementary School, 100 Telephone Road (1927). When he designed the Educational Building for the First Methodist Church, 1320 Main (1929), he not only designed the building to be sympathetic to the neighboring historic church building, but the building was also designed for possible future conversion into an office space. In 1930 he designed a four-story retail store and administration building for the Peden Iron & Steel Company, 610 N. San Jacinto. This building, designed in the modernistic Perpendicular style, was one of the last constructed in the Fifth Ward "factory district."

Bailey's Barringer-Norton Building is the only Tudor Revival style building in the Downtown Historic District. Despite its exuberant façade, its use as a retail establishment and its physical massing made it consistent with the other historic buildings in the district. Other buildings, especially the banking structures, in the district in the 1920s were mainly constructed in the Classical Revival style or constructed in another sensible commercial style and housed retail ventures.

Barringer-Norton Company, which moved its headquarters to 506 Main in 1928, is still one of the premier men's clothing stores in Houston. Today the company is known as Norton Ditto. While the company had leased space in various other locations prior to 1928, their new headquarters was planned as their showcase. They even advertised their store as "Norton's, Houston's Best Shop for Men, furnishings, hats, clothing, tailors."

The building's use as a gentlemen's clothiers lent itself nicely to the style chosen for the façade. The 1920s was a period when many gentlemen's clubs, country clubs and larger homes across the nation were built with an English Manorial influence in an attempt to reconnect with Anglo-Saxon traditions. It is not surprising that the Barringer-Norton Company chose such a style for their retail store given the quality of their clothing line and the stately image that the Tudor Revival façade projected. This gentlemen's image can be seen clearly in the rendering by the architect, who placed golf clubs in the store window and late model cars on the street.

By the time that Barringer-Norton Company left the 506 Main location for a larger and more upscale shop in a downtown skyscraper, they advertised as "The Southwest's Finest Men's Store, the finest ready-to-wear clothing, sportswear, furnishings and the very finest custom tailoring." Their move to the Esperson Building in 1946, in the heart of the new commercial district, represents the company's growth and prominence. Zales Jewelers, which moved into the vacant shop at 506 Main in 1946, extensively remodeled the Tudor Revival first floor storefront. Zales, like Norton-Ditto, was a Houston-owned and operated retail business. It abandoned their shop at 506 Main in 1962 as the company grew and expanded to the suburban malls. This trend to leave downtown brought about the commercial decline in quality retailing, building maintenance and less desirable uses.

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### RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

Currently the Barringer-Norton Building survives with only its second floor intact. None of the first floor storefront façade remains. The opening is secured with a corrugated metal and wire roll-down security gate. There is a canopy mechanism in existence and a steel beam has been attached to the gable front probably as a bracket for previous signage. On September 9, 1999 the owner was granted a certificate of appropriateness by the HAHC to restore the first floor storefront façade. The work approved included the following: to restore the upper façade by repairing the existing windows, stucco, and half-timbering as needed using the same materials as existing; remove the projecting steel I-beam from the gable end (not original to the building); remove the steel mast from the roof (not original to the building); rebuild the first floor façade (which was removed and replaced with a metal roll-up door); rebuild the first floor façade by installing divided light transom windows (at their original location) to resemble the existing upper casement windows; the original symmetrical rhythm of the storefront will be emulated using a combination of fixed glass and wood doors; paired doors in the center, fixed glass on either side and single doors on each end of the storefront; the extra two doors are required to meet current life-safety codes; the doors will emulate the original doors made of wood with elongated glass in a diamond-shaped divided-light pattern; two fixed glass display windows will surmount wooden panels at an elevation even with the kick-plate of the doors; doors will be surrounded with walls finished in stucco and wood trim to match the existing upper floor.

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

#### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

**S N S - satisfies N - not applicable**

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- ☐ ☒ (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☒ (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- ☐ ☒ (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- ☒ ☐ (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- ☒ ☐ (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- ☒ ☐ (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☒ (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;

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- ☐ ☒ (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

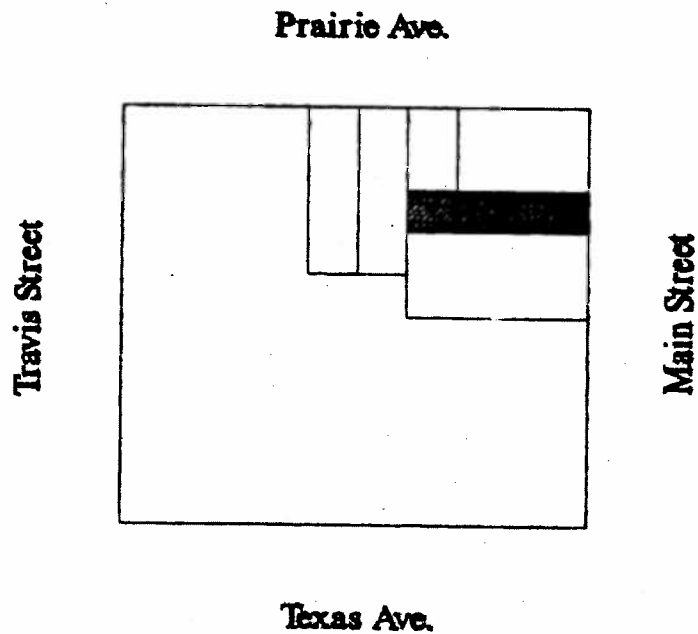
That the Houston Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends landmark designation of the Barringer-Norton Building to City Council since the application complies with the applicable criteria.

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**SITE LOCATION MAP**  
**BARRINGER-NORTON COMPANY BUILDING**  
**506 MAIN STREET**  
**NOT TO SCALE**





**AGENDA ITEM: IIa**

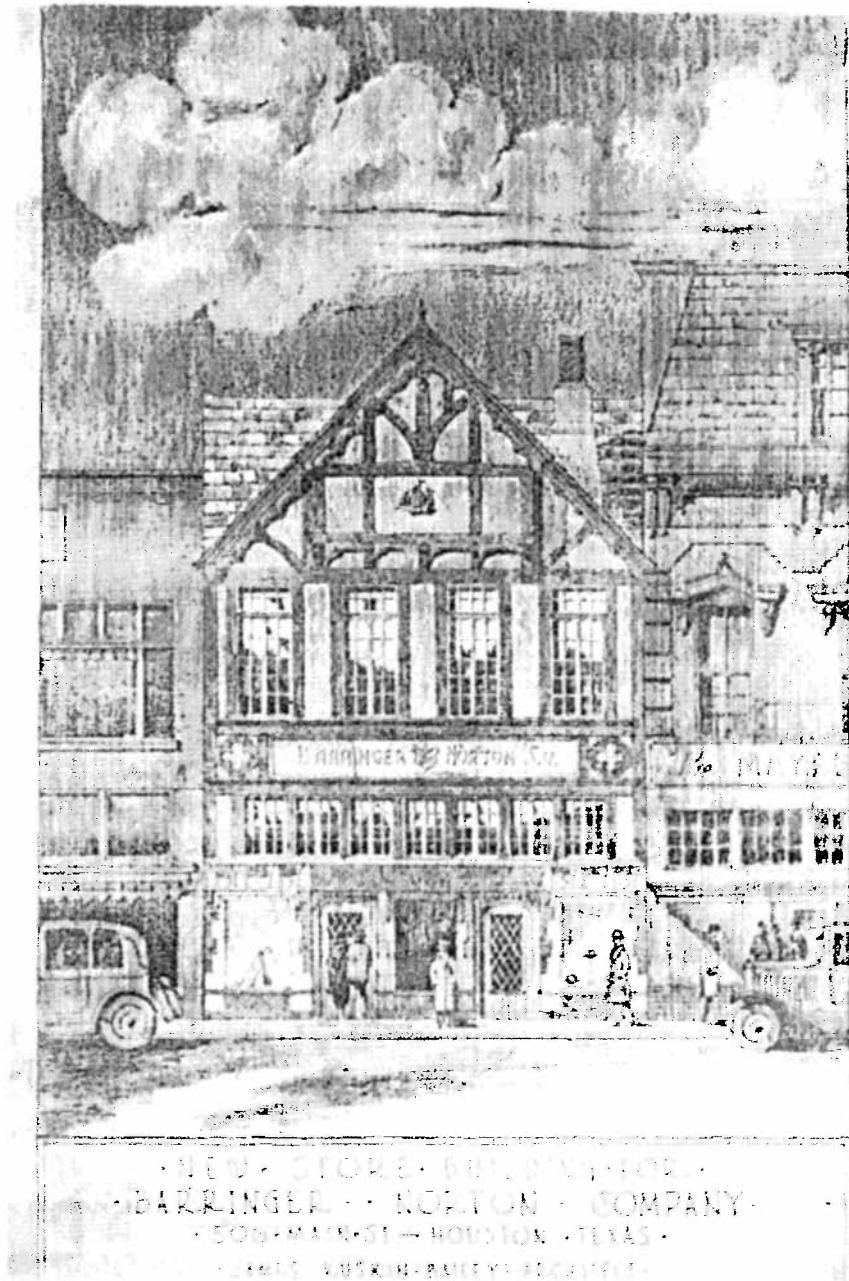
**SITE NAME:** Barringer-Norton Building

**HPO File no.** 990803

**SITE LOCATION:** 506 Main Street - Main Street/Market Square Historic District

Artist's Rendering of Storefront as Remodeled in 1928  
506 Main Street  
Not to Scale

*The Book of Houston - 1928*



**CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS**

